

# The Discovery of Being & Thomas Aquinas

Philosophical and Theological  
Perspectives

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## ABBREVIATIONS

### Individual Works of Thomas Aquinas

<i>Comp. Theol.</i>	<i>Compendium theologiae seu brevis compilatio theologiae ad fratrem Raynaldum</i>
<i>De Ente</i>	<i>Sermo sive tractatus De ente et essentia</i>
<i>De Malo</i>	<i>Quaestiones disputatae De malo</i>
<i>De Pot.</i>	<i>Quaestiones disputatae De potentia Dei</i>
<i>De Spir.</i>	<i>Quaestio disputata De spiritualibus creaturis</i>
<i>De Ver.</i>	<i>Quaestiones disputatae De veritate</i>
<i>Expos. de Trin.</i>	<i>Expositio super librum Boethii de Trinitate</i>
<i>In de Heb.</i>	<i>Expositio libri Boethii De Hebdomadibus</i>
<i>In Ioh.</i>	<i>Lectura super Ioannem</i>
<i>In Meta.</i>	<i>Sententia super Metaphysicam</i>
<i>In Peri Her.</i>	<i>Expositio libri Peryermenias</i>
<i>In Phys.</i>	<i>Sententia super Physicam</i>
<i>In Sent.</i>	<i>Scriptum super libros Sententiarum</i>
<i>Quodl.</i>	<i>Quaestiones de quodlibet I–XII</i>
<i>SCG</i>	<i>Summa Contra Gentiles</i>
<i>ST</i>	<i>Summa Theologiae</i>

### Other Works

<i>DS</i>	<i>Enchiridion Symbolorum</i> (ed. Denzinger)
<i>Leon.</i>	<i>Editio Leonina</i> (Aquinas)
<i>PG</i>	<i>Patrologia Graeca</i> (ed. Migne)

## Aquinas and the Categories as Parts of Being

GREGORY T. DOOLAN

For Thomas Aquinas, the ten categories first identified by Aristotle are the ten supreme *genera*, *genera* that follow from ten fundamental modes of being (*modi essendi*).<sup>1</sup> Thus, we find him noting in a number of places throughout his writings that being (*ens*) is divided by (*per*), or into (*in*), these ten categories.<sup>2</sup> This language indicates that for Thomas the categories are, in some respect, parts of the whole that is being. In what

1. Thomas Aquinas, *De Ver.*, q. 1, a. 1, co., editio Leonina (hereafter, Leon.) (Rome: Leonine Commission, 1975), 22.1:5.116–23: “Sunt enim diversi gradus entitatis secundum quos accipiuntur diversi modi essendi et iuxta hos modos accipiuntur diversa rerum genera; substantia enim non addit super ens aliquam differentiam quae designet aliquam naturam superadditam enti sed nomine substantiae exprimitur specialis quidam modus essendi, scilicet per se ens, et ita est in aliis generibus.” Although Thomas himself prefers to refer to the Aristotelian categories as the “predicaments” (*praedicamenta*), I will instead refer to them as “categories” because that is the term more commonly employed today. All translations from the Latin are my own.

2. There appears to be no distinction in meaning in his use of these different prepositions. For instances where he employs the preposition *in*, see, e.g., *In Sent.* I, d. 22, q. 1, a. 1, ad 2; *In Phys.* III, l. 5, n. 322; *In Meta.* V, l. 9, n. 885, and VII, l. 1, n. 1246. For instances where he employs the preposition *per*, see, e.g., *In Sent.* I, d. 19, q. 5, a. 1, ad 1; II, d. 34, q. 1, a. 1, co.; IV, d. 1, q. 1, a. 4, ad 1; *De Ente*, chap. 1; SCG III.8.13; *ST I*, q. 5, a. 6, ad 1; q. 48, a. 2, ad 2; *In Meta.* V, l. 9, n. 889; VII, l. 1, n. 1245; IX, l. 1, n. 1769; *De Malo*, q. 7, a. 1, ad 1. Thomas also at times refers to *ens* as divided “according to” (*secundum*) the categories. See, e.g., *In Meta.* V, l. 12, n. 930, and IX, l. 11, n. 1895. Because *esse* is the principle by which *ens* is *ens*, Thomas also at times speaks of *esse* as divided by the categories. See, e.g., *In Sent.* III, d. 6, q. 2, a. 2, co., and *Quodl.* IX, q. 2, a. 2, co.

follows, I will offer some considerations of how he views the traditional ten Aristotelian categories as such parts. To this end, my essay will consist of three sections. In the first, I will examine what for Thomas it means to say that being is "divided" into the ten categories. In the second section, I will briefly consider his account of the derivation of the categories in an effort to discern whether he considers the traditional list of ten to be an exhaustive list of all possible categorial parts of being. Finally, in the third section I will examine whether he thinks that in reality being must be manifested through all ten categories. As I intend to show, for Thomas these categories are necessary parts of this universe and, perhaps, any universe that God would create.

### Being as Divided by the Categories

If we wish to understand what Thomas means when he says that being is "divided" into the categories, we need to identify what he thinks is divided. To begin with, it is helpful to recall a frequent observation by Thomas that the term "being" (*ens*) can be taken in two respects. In one respect it signifies the truth of a proposition, which consists in a judgment of composition. In this sense, even what does not really exist as such can be said "to be," as when a privation such as blindness is said "to be" in the eye. In the second respect, "being" signifies the entity of a thing (*entitas rei*). This is the sort of being that exists (or is capable of existing) outside of the mind. And it is in this sense, Thomas tells us, that being is divided into the ten categories.<sup>3</sup> His distinction provides us with some clarity regarding what the categories divide. But still further clarification is needed, because when he says that they divide being, the being to which he is referring is not *a* being (*unum ens*), such as Socrates. Nor is it the first being (*primum ens*), God. Rather, he is referring

3. ST I, q. 48, a. 2, ad 2. See also texts cited in note 2, above. When commenting on Book V of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, Thomas identifies additional senses of being (*ens*). After distinguishing between *ens per se* and *ens per accidens*, he identifies three senses of *per se* being: perfect being (*ens perfectum*), being as true (*ens ut verum*), and being as divided by act and potency. "Perfect being" lies outside the mind (*ens naturae*, or real being) and is divided by the categories; "being as true" concerns the truth of a proposition and as such "is" only within the mind (*viz.*, as logical being). Act and potency divide both real being (because it divides all of the categories) and logical being (because the mind can either actually or potentially know something). See *In Meta.* V, l. 9, nn. 885–97.

to *being-in-general* (*ens commune*): the universal class to which all finite beings belong.<sup>4</sup>

To say that *ens commune* is divided into the categories is to acknowledge that in some way it possesses unity in itself—that in some way it is one. Commenting on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, Thomas reminds us that the essential characteristic of unity is undividedness. And, following Aristotle, he identifies four principal senses in which things can be "one": as continuous in nature, according to form, as a singular thing, and as a universal.<sup>5</sup> It is this last sense that concerns us here; for as the very name *ens commune* indicates, what we are considering is a sort of universal.

Following this sense, a thing is said to be one according to a single *ratio*—a single "intelligible characteristic." As such, it is one insofar as it is understood—insofar as it is grasped by the mind according to a single apprehension of an undivided object. Consider, as examples, species such as *man* and *horse*; according to Thomas, such universals do not exist outside of the mind with a unity as universals. They are one only according to knowledge and concept (*secundum scientiam et notitiam*). Still, we should be careful here not to read Thomas as a nominalist, as though he viewed universals as mere mental fabrications. Although there is no nature in distinct singular things that is numerically one which we could call a species, he tells us that our intellect apprehends as one that characteristic that the individuals share in common.<sup>6</sup> Thus, what in reality is

4. Considering the subject matter of metaphysics, Thomas notes that "haec scientia consideret ens commune sicut proprium subiectum, quod quidem dividitur per substantiam et novem genera accidentium." *In Meta.* VIII, l. 1, n. 1682, ed. M. R. Cathara and R. M. Spiazzi (Turin: Marietti, 1950), 402. Earlier in his commentary, when considering the four senses of being (*ens*) outlined in *Metaphysics* V, he instead identifies *ens perfectum* as what is divided by the categories. I would argue, however, that these two accounts of what the categories divide are not in conflict, because the division of *ens perfectum* results in a division of *ens commune*. This conclusion follows by reduction: Thomas presents *per accidens* being as reduced to *per se* being; logical being as reduced to perfect being; and the division of being by act and potency as subsequent to the division of being into the categories (*In Meta.* V, l. 9, nn. 885–97; see also VII, l. 1, n. 1245–46; IX, l. 1, nn. 1768–69; IX, l. 11, n. 1895). Insofar as perfect being is primary among these four senses of being, then, we can conclude that the categories thereby divide *ens commune*. And inasmuch as *ens commune* is divided by the categories, so too is *esse commune*. See, e.g., *In Sent.* III, d. 6, q. 2, a. 2, co., and *Quodl.* IX, q. 2, a. 2, co. On the reduction of the different senses of being to being as divided by the categories, see Ralph McInerny, "Notes on Being and Predication," *Laval théologique et philosophique* 15 (1959): 236–74, at 273–74.

5. *In Meta.* X, l. 1, nn. 1921–34; Aristotle, *Metaphysics* X.1, 1052a15–b1.

6. *In Meta.* X, l. 1, n. 1930.

diverse in diverse individuals is made indivisible (and, hence, "one") as a universal in the apprehension of the intellect.

For Thomas, this account is no less true regarding *ens commune*. Without getting into the debates among Thomists regarding the formation of the concept of being, suffice it to say that in considering the really distinct individual beings that we experience, our intellect is capable of forming a concept of being—the intellect finds in these diverse beings the common *ratio* of being: "what is" (*quod est*). And forming the concept of being, we apprehend this unity that is a universal, which the metaphysician will come to recognize as being *qua* being, which Thomas terms being-in-general, *ens commune*.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, even though *ens commune* is undivided in *ratio*, our experience and understanding of diverse beings also shows us that it is somehow divisible; *ens commune* is a whole that in some way consists of parts.

Again, commenting on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, Thomas explains what a "whole" (*totum*) is.<sup>8</sup> The common notion (*ratio*) of a whole consists in two characteristics. First, the perfection (or completion) of a whole is derived from its parts. If a part is missing, the whole is not complete. We could consider a dog such as Fido: if he lost an eye in a fight, his body (which consists of parts) would be incomplete—it would not be whole. Thus, quoting Aristotle, Thomas notes that something is called "whole" for which none of its parts is missing. The second characteristic of a whole is that those parts perfecting the whole are, in turn, united in it and made one. Thus Fido's parts not only complete his body, but they are all of *one* body insofar as they are contained in that body.

In light of these considerations, Thomas follows Aristotle in identifying two kinds of wholes: an integral whole and a universal whole.<sup>9</sup>

7. For summaries of the different accounts of the formation of the concept of being (both prephilosophical and philosophical) see Joseph Owens, "Aquinas on Knowing Existence," *Review of Metaphysics* 29 (1976): 670–90; Jan A. Aertsen, "Method and Metaphysics: The *via resolutionis* in Thomas Aquinas," *New Scholasticism* 63 (1989): 405–18; Jan A. Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals: The Case of Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 170–93; John F. Wipfel, *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1984), 69–104, and *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 23–62.

8. *In Meta.* V, l. 21, nn. 1098–1108.

9. *Ibid.*, nn. 1099–1101. I am considering Thomas's treatment out of order here for the purposes of this essay. Elsewhere, Thomas identifies a third kind of whole, the sort that includes potential or power parts, such as the soul (*ST I*, q. 77, a. 1, ad 1; *II-II*, q. 48, a. 1, co.; *In De An.*, a. 19, ad 4).

An integral whole is one in such a way that none of its parts is the one thing. The most obvious case of an integral whole is something that consists of quantitative parts, as in my example of Fido's body. No one part of his body is the whole body. And in an integral whole, the whole is not predicable of any of the parts: neither Fido's eye nor his leg nor any other bodily part could be called his "body." By contrast, a universal whole is one in such a way that it is predicable of each of its parts. For example, the genus *animal* is a whole that contains the species *man* and *horse*, and it is predicable of each of them. The reason that it is predicable of such parts is that the parts are present in the universal whole in such a way that each is the whole. Thus, we can say that the species *man* is *animal*, and so too with *horse* and every other species of *animal*.

It is clear in the case of an integral whole that its parts (which Thomas terms "integral parts") perfect the whole, because without them the whole is lacking in some way. But what about the parts of a universal whole, which he terms "subjective parts"?<sup>10</sup> It seems, in fact, that what he at first listed as a general characteristic of a whole does not apply to a universal whole. Indeed, shortly after identifying it in the *Metaphysics* commentary, Thomas notes that only a quantified whole can be mutilated, or made imperfect, through the loss of a part: "For a universal whole cannot be said to be mutilated if one of its species were taken away."<sup>11</sup> As he makes clear elsewhere, subjective parts are not required for the perfection of a universal whole because the perfect *ratio* of the whole is found in every part, as the genus *animal* is found in the species *man*.<sup>12</sup>

It should be clear that for Thomas *ens commune* is a universal whole. Indeed, he tells us that the division pertaining to being is not the same as the sort pertaining to continuous quantity.<sup>13</sup> To say that being is divided into the ten categories does not mean that it is divided into tenths, like a pie. Rather, as a universal whole, it is divided in such a way that it is nevertheless predicable of each of its parts: "being" is predicable of

10. *In Meta.* V, l. 21, n. 1097. See also *ST II-II*, q. 48, a. 1, co., and q. 120, a. 2, co.

11. *In Meta.* V, l. 21, n. 1110: "Non enim totum universale potest dici colobon si una species eius auferatur" (286).

12. *In Sent.* IV, d. 16, q. 1, a. 1, q. 3, s.c. 1, ed. M. F. Moos (Paris: Lethielleux, 1947), 4:771: "Partes subjectivae non requiruntur ad perfectionem totius universalis: quia in qualibet parte perfecta ratio totius invenitur, sicut perfecta ratio animalis in homine."

13. *In Meta.* X, l. 4, n. 1997.

each and every category. Still, even though it is a universal whole, *ens commune* is not divided in the same way as a genus is. Thomas is careful to explain that there are two ways in which universals are divided into their parts, and these two ways are based upon the mode of universality that is involved.<sup>14</sup>

A genus is one type of universal, which is divided into species by differences that are not entailed in the *ratio* of the genus. Thus, the genus *animal* is divided into the species *man*, *horse*, etc., and it is divided equally, which is to say, univocally. By contrast, another type of universal is not divided according to differences, but instead according to “diverse modes.”<sup>15</sup> It is universal according to analogy. And it is in this way that being is divided into the categories; for as Thomas famously notes following Aristotle, being is not a genus.<sup>16</sup> Although it is truly predicated of each and every category, being is not predicated of each according

14. *In Sent.* II, d. 42, q. 1, a. 3, co., ed. Mandonnet (Paris: Lethielleux, 1929), 2:1057: “Duplex modus dividendi commune in ea quae sub ipso sunt, sicut est duplex communitatis modus. Est enim quaedam divisio univoci in species per differentias quibus aequaliter natura generis in speciebus participatur, sicut animal dividitur in hominem et equum, et huiusmodi; alia vero divisio est ejus quod est commune per analogiam, quod quidem secundum perfectam rationem praedicatur de uno dividendum, et de altero imperfecte et secundum quid, sicut ens dividitur in substantiam et accedens, et in ens actu et in ens potentia; et haec divisio est quasi media inter aequivocum et univocum.” See also *In Sent.* I, d. 22, q. 1, a. 3, ad 2; *ST II-II*, q. 120, a. 2, co.

15. *In Sent.* I, d. 22, q. 1, a. 3, ad 2 (ed. Mandonnet, 1:538): “Aliter dividitur aequivocum, analogum et univocum. Aequivocum enim dividitur secundum res significatas; univocum vero dividitur secundum differentias; sed analogum dividitur secundum diversos modos. Unde cum ens praedicatur analogice de decem generibus, dividitur in ea secundum diversos modos. Unde unicuique generi debetur proprius modus praedicandi.” We can infer that there are no universals of the purely equivocal precisely because they are divided according to diverse *res significatae* and share no commonality.

16. See e.g., *De principiis naturae* 6; *In De interpretatione* I, l. 8, n. 5; *In Meta.* I, l. 9, n. 139. The analogical character of being is one of two reasons Thomas cites for why *ens commune* is not a genus; the other reason is that, unlike a genus, *ens commune* includes all differences. On this point see, e.g., *In Meta.* III, l. 8, n. 433; *De Ver.*, q. 1, a. 1. Despite his conclusion that *ens commune* is not a genus, in a number of places Thomas nevertheless explicitly refers to it as such (see, e.g., *In Meta.*, Prooemium; *De Ente*, chap. 6; *SCG I* 28.8; *ST I*, q. 2, a. 3, co., *quarta via*; *De Malo*, q. 1, a. 1, ad 11). The reason Thomas will refer to being in this way is that he sometimes will use the term “genus” in an extended, or metaphorical, way to speak of analogical communities because they are like *genera* as regards their universality. In one location, he refers to “genus” taken in this sense as a metaphysical genus, contrasting it with both a natural genus and logical genus, which are univocal in character. See my “Substance as a Metaphysical Genus,” in *The Science of Being as Being: Metaphysical Investigations*, ed. Gregory T. Doolan (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 99–128. Regarding Thomas’s use of the term “metaphysical genus,” see *De spiritualibus creaturis*, a. 1, ad 10.

to a *ratio* that is entirely the same. Rather, each of the nine categories of accidents is called “being” with reference to substance, inasmuch as substance is the subject of the other categories. Thus, being is predicated according to a relationship of priority and posteriority.<sup>17</sup>

In this way, then, the universal whole that is *being-in-general* is divided into the categories as its subjective parts.<sup>18</sup> We might ask, then, whether being requires *all* of these parts. If we consider Thomas’s observation that subjective parts are not required for the perfection of a universal whole, it seems that being does not need all of them. Does this mean that its division into the ten categories is merely contingent upon the structure of the universe as God has willed it? Could being be divided by other, different categories? Or by a shorter list? To begin to answer these questions, let us turn to a brief discussion of Thomas’s account of the derivation of the categories.

### The Derivation of the Categories

Thomas provides us with detailed accounts of this derivation in two of his works: the commentary on Aristotle’s *Physics* and the commentary on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*.<sup>19</sup> Although these accounts are similar, there are some notable differences between them (see figure 6-1). Because the latter is Thomas’s more mature presentation as well as the more metaphysical one, it will be my focus here.<sup>20</sup>

17. *De principiis naturis* 6.

18. *ST II-II*, q. 120, a. 2, co., Leon. (Rome: Leonine Commission, 1897), 8:470: “Pars autem subiectiva est de qua essentialiter praedicatur totum, et est in minus. Quod quidem contingit dupliciter: quandoque enim aliquid praedicatur de pluribus secundum unam rationem, sicut animal de equo et bove; quandoque autem praedicatur secundum prius et posterius, sicut ens praedicatur de substantia et accidente.”

19. See *In Phys.* III, l. 5, nn. 321–24 (written 1268–69), and *In Meta.* V, l. 9, nn. 889–97 (written 1270–71). Dating of Thomas’s texts follows Jean-Pierre Torrell’s *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 1, *The Person and His Works*, rev. ed., trans. Robert Royal (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005).

20. For scholarship on Thomas’s derivation of the categories, see John F. Wippel, “Thomas Aquinas’s Derivation of the Aristotelian Categories (Predicaments),” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 25 (1987): 13–34, and *Metaphysical Thought*, 208–28; E. P. Bos and A. C. van der Helm, “The Division of Being over the Categories According to Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas and John Duns Scotus,” in *John Duns Scotus: Renewal of Philosophy* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998), 183–96, at 187–89; Paul Symington, “Thomas Aquinas on Establishing the Identity of Aristotle’s Categories,” in *Medieval Commentaries on Aristotle’s Categories*, ed. Lloyd Newton



The Derivation of the Categories (*In Meta. V*, l. 9, nn. 889–97)

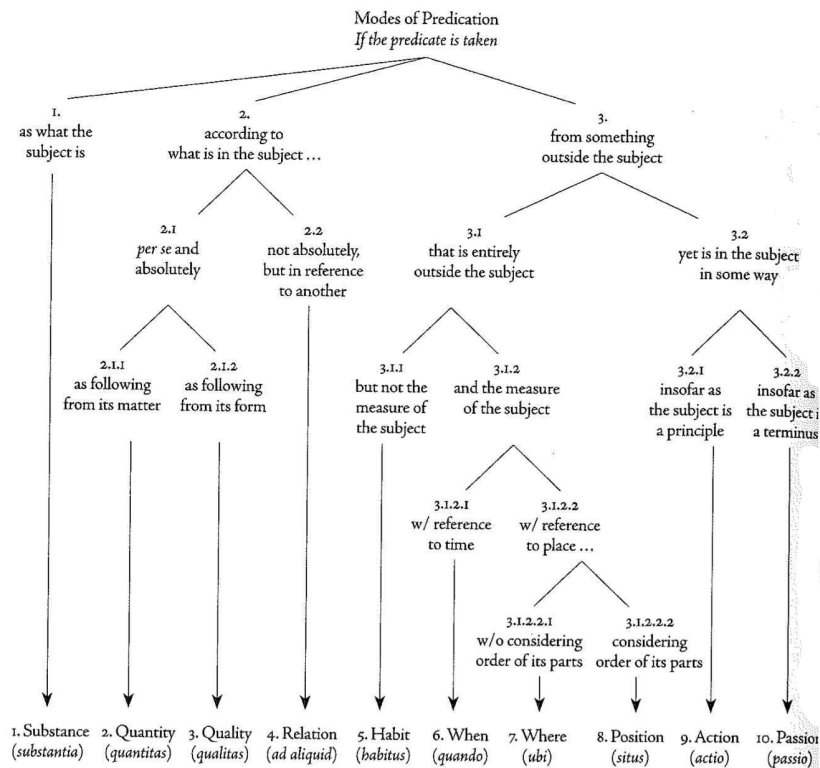
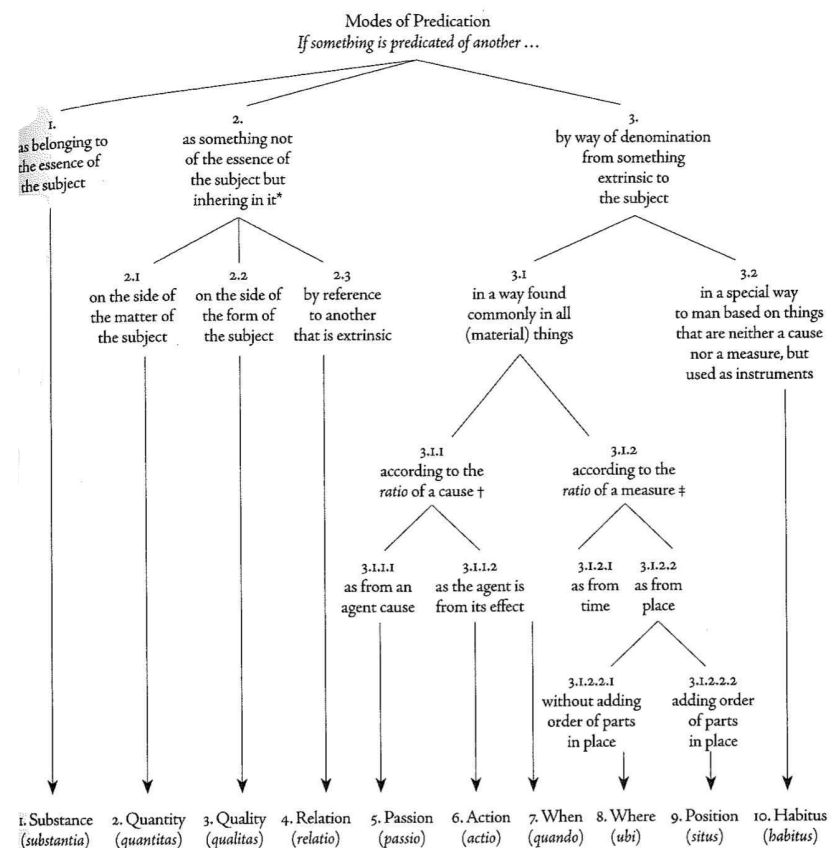


FIGURE 6-1. The Derivation of the Categories in *In Meta. V*, l. 9, nn. 889–97, and *In Phys. III*, l. 5, n. 322

The Derivation of the Categories (*In Phys. III*, l. 5, n. 322)



\* Although Thomas does not explicitly divide this second mode of predication in terms of absolute and non-absolute inherence as he does in his later commentary on the *Metaphysics*, he nevertheless implicitly acknowledges here that basic division when he gives an example of fatherhood as a relation: "cum enim dico homo est pater, non praedicatur de homine aliquid absolutum, sed respectus qui ei inest ad aliquid extrinsecum."

† An extrinsic cause. Thomas notes here that matter and form are intrinsic causes, which are parts of the essence of a (material) being. Hence, predication based upon these causes pertains to the category substance. Although the final cause, like the agent cause, is extrinsic to the effect; since it only has the character (ratio) of a cause inasmuch as it moves the agent, it does not cause anything apart from the agent cause. Hence, Thomas concludes that the only extrinsic cause from which something is denominated is the agent cause.

‡ An extrinsic measure. If the subject is denominated by a measure that is intrinsic, the denomination pertains to the category quantity. He identifies these measures as the subject's length, width, and depth.

In his *In Meta.* V, l. 9, Thomas explains that the division of being into the categories is of the kind that lies outside the mind—real being as opposed to logical being. But how do we know that such being is divided into the categories that Aristotle identifies? Aristotle himself never offers a justification for his division; but Thomas now does. Going beyond a literal commentary of the text at hand, he offers a methodology for deriving the categories.

As he explains, the sorts of things that are said in the proper sense “to be” are the sorts of things that signify the different figures of predication. Reminding us that being is not a genus, Thomas notes that it cannot be divided by differences but is instead divided according to diverse modes of predication. Lest we think this is merely a linguistic or grammatical account of the derivation of the categories, Thomas is careful to note that these modes of predication themselves follow from diverse modes of existing (*modi essendi*), because in whatever way the term “being” (*ens*) is predicated, in just as many ways “to be” (*esse*) is signified. It is for this reason that Thomas commonly calls the categories “predicaments.”

Following this approach, which he terms the method of predication (*modus praedicandi*), Thomas offers a detailed account of the derivation of the categories. He notes that some words signify “what a thing is” (or *substance*) as when we say, “A human is an animal.” Some words signify “what sort” (or *quality*) as when we say, “A human is white.” Some signify “how much” (or *quantity*), and so forth. I will not get into the details of how he derives each category (instead, see figure 6-1). Suffice it to say that according to Thomas, every mode of predication must signify a mode of existing (*esse*).<sup>21</sup>

Still, Thomas himself grants that in itself the method of predication is a logical methodology, because predication is the province of logic. It is not metaphysics that studies *genera* and species, but logic. This is so because a genus, such as a category, is not a real being (*ens naturae*) but only a being of reason (*ens rationis*), for a genus taken as such cannot

(Leiden: Brill, 2008), 119–44; Paul Symington, *On Determining What There Is: The Identify of Ontological Categories in Aquinas, Scotus and Lowe* (Piscataway, N.J.: Ontos, 2010); and Gregory T. Doolan, “Aquinas on the Metaphysician’s vs. the Logician’s Categories,” *Quaestiones Disputatae* 4 (2014): 133–55.

21. *In Meta.* V, l. 9, nn. 889–97.

exist outside of the mind. Nevertheless, our concepts and words signify things in reality. And because there is this connection between predication and real being, he concludes that the method of predication can be employed in the service of metaphysics.<sup>22</sup> There are some limitations to its use as such a tool, but he thinks it is effective at least in this basic respect: namely, in identifying the fundamental modes of being.<sup>23</sup>

Considering Thomas’s use of this tool, scholars generally agree that he views all ten of the traditional Aristotelian categories as real modes of being (a view not held by most of his later medieval counterparts). For Thomas, none of these categories is reducible to any of the others; rather each is a distinct, irreducible mode of being. Again, scholars also tend to agree that he views the list of ten categories as sufficient in number, exhaustive of all possible modes of (finite) being.<sup>24</sup> It seems that in Thomas’s view, there could not be an eleventh category or further additional categories. This conclusion follows from his use of the method of predication, which, as he presents it, provides a list of modes of being that are mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive. The list of ten categories is complete: they are all *per se* parts of being (*ens commune*), and being must be divided in terms of them. If that is the case, we might next ask if he considers them also to be necessary parts of the universe.

### The Categories as “Parts” of the Universe

As we have seen, Thomas’s use of the method of predication is intended to offer a quasi-deduction of the categories. But that does not mean that it is intended to prove what *in fact* exists. Consistently, Thomas avoids the path of the rationalist who argues from the mind to the world. Even though the method is a logical one, as he employs it the method presupposes experience of the world: an experience of beings *in* the categories—beings that we come to know and talk about. He does not try to

22. *In Meta.* IV, l. 4, n. 574; VII, l. 1, n. 1253; VII, l. 3, n. 1308.

23. One such limitation is that the logician is concerned with formal definition and not with act and potency. As a result, he treats genera as univocal which in reality are analogical. One such genus is the very category *substance*. On this point, see *Expos. de Trin.*, q. 4, a. 2. On the analogical character of the genus *substance*, see my “Substance as Metaphysical Genus,” 99–128. See also my “Aquinas on the Metaphysician’s vs. the Logician’s Categories.”

24. See note 20 above.

deduce the categories in a purely *a priori* way. Hence, for Thomas, simply to say that the categories are *per se* parts of being is not to say that they are necessary parts of this universe. What the method of predication reveals is that they are *per se* parts of the universal whole that is *ens commune*: the concept of being-in-general. As such, the method in itself does not on its own tell us what is actually existing—or even what must exist—but tells us only what is absolutely possible inasmuch as it does not violate the principle of noncontradiction.<sup>25</sup>

With that said, I would contend that another line of Thomas's reasoning does suggest that all ten categories are indeed in some sense necessary parts of the universe. This is the picture we get if we consider his observations regarding the perfection of the universe, observations in which he maintains that certain parts of the universe were necessarily created by God. This statement will no doubt seem surprising if we consider what he has to say about God's freedom and power.

According to Thomas, not only is God free to create or not to create, but he is also free to create a different universe, and it is in his power to do so. Thus, he could create a universe with only angels.<sup>26</sup> And if he did create such a universe, there would be nothing existing, for example, in the categories *position* or *place*: these modes of existence would remain uninstantiated. Again, God could create a universe with only accidents. Even though Thomas holds that it belongs to an accident to exist within a substance, he also notes that it is within God's power to cause an accident to exist independently of any substance, as occurs in the case of the Eucharist.<sup>27</sup> Following this account, it seems to be within God's power to create a universe with no beings in the category *substance* (as curious as such a universe would be). And again, following from Thomas's metaphysics, God is free to create either of these alternate universes.

25. Regarding Thomas's identification of the principle of noncontradiction as the standard for determining absolute possibility, see e.g., *De Pot.*, q. 1, a. 3. One might object that the method of predication could at least tell us what exists with hypothetical necessity, for one might argue that if accidents exist, so must substance. Nevertheless, this line of reasoning does not hold up if we consider that Thomas considers it to be within God's power to create accidents that do not in fact depend upon substances, as occurs in the case of the Eucharist. See *In Sent.* IV, d. 12, q. 1 a. 1, qa. 1, ad 1, and ST III, q. 77, a. 1, ad 2.

26. Thomas indicates at least the possibility of a universe with only two angels in *In Sent.* I d. 44, q. 1, a. 2, ad 6. See note 32 below.

27. See note 25 above.

To my knowledge, Thomas never explicitly answers the question whether this given universe or any universe God might create must contain instantiations of each of the ten categories. Nevertheless, I believe he offers an implicit answer to this question in his various discussions about the parts of the universe. On a number of occasions, he considers the universe as an integral whole, noting that certain parts are essential for its perfections. In the *Summa contra Gentiles*, for example, he tells us that "it pertains to divine providence that the grades of being [*gradus entium*] that are possible be fulfilled .... But being [*ens*] is divided by the contingent and the necessary, and this is a *per se* division of being. If therefore divine providence were to exclude all contingency, not all the grades of beings would be preserved."<sup>28</sup> In addition to the contingent and necessary, elsewhere he identifies the grades of beings in terms of the incorporeal and the corporeal, and the simple and the composite.<sup>29</sup> In each case, the implication is the same: the universe without these grades would be imperfect. As God did not create an imperfect universe, he must necessarily have created it with these essential parts.

In making these claims, Thomas is not arguing that every possible *species* must be created for the universe to be complete. Cajetan, commenting on one of Thomas's arguments for the existence of angels, clarifies this point by drawing a distinction between the grades of beings (*gradus rerum*) and the special modes (*modi speciales*) of these grades. As he explains, for Thomas the grades of being are determined by various degrees of act and potency. Hence there is a finite number of them. The supreme of these is most like God, and this is the grade of intellectual being. As regards the special modes (or species) of beings, there is again only a finite number as created, although as regards logical possibility and God's power, the number of possible species is infinite.<sup>30</sup>

28. SCG III.72.3, Leon. (Rome: Leonine Commission, 1926), 14:214: "Ad divinam providentiam pertinet ut gradus entium qui possibiles sunt, adimpleantur, ut ex supra dictis patet. Ens autem dividitur per contingens et necessarium: et est per se divisio entis. Si igitur divina providentia excluderet omnem contingentiam, non omnes gradus entium conservarentur."

29. ST I, q. 48, a. 2, co.; SCG III.72.3; ST I, q. 22, a. 2, co.; *De Pot.*, q. 3, a. 16, co.

30. Cajetan, *Commentaria, Summa theologiae* I, q. 50, a. 1, Leon., 5:4–5: "Unde perfectio universi exigit quidem continentiam omnium graduum creabilium, sed non omnes creaturas creabiles. Et ideo ex perfectione universi optime infertur gradus intellectualis." I am grateful to Fr. Lawrence Dewan for drawing my attention to Cajetan's commentary on this article. For Dewan's own discussion of this text, see "Thomas Aquinas and Being as a Nature," *Acta Philosophica* 12 (2003): 123–35, at 134.

If we follow Cajetan's reading, the perfection of the universe does not require the creation of any given species such as dog, oak tree, or rhinestone; it does, however, require the creation of at least some species of material beings and, similarly, some (or at least one) immaterial being. For, as Cajetan explains, "the perfection of the universe requires that it contain all grades of creatable things, but not all creatable creatures."<sup>31</sup> Still, this notion appears to be at odds with Thomas's doctrine of divine freedom: how is it that there can be necessary parts of the universe if it is within God's power and freedom to create a universe without them?

Thomas provides an answer to this question, among other places, in *De Pot.*, q. 3, a. 16, where he makes clear that although certain things are necessarily created, this necessity is a suppositional (or hypothetical) necessity, not an absolute one. There is no absolute necessity for God to create any kind of being because he need not create at all. But given the supposition that he does create, Thomas concludes that God must create certain things in a certain way. For example, if he creates man, God must create man as an animal that is rational, having both body and soul, otherwise what he creates would not be man. Similarly if God makes a universe at all, Thomas concludes that it must have certain essential parts, just as a house requires certain parts for it to be complete and to be a house, such as walls and a roof. And given that he has willed to make *such* a universe (*tale universum*)—by which I take Thomas to mean one like this given universe—it was necessary that God produce many and diverse creatures as its parts, some of which are simple, some composed, some corruptible, some incorruptible: in short, the grades of being mentioned before.<sup>32</sup> And this hypothetical necessity, Thomas tells us, follows from the intended form of the universe, which form he thinks we can infer from experience of the universe in which we live.<sup>33</sup>

31. Cajetan, *Commentaria, Summa theologiae* I, q. 50, a. 1, Leon., 5:4–5.

32. Thus, Thomas notes, "quamvis angelus absolute sit melior quam lapis, tamen utraque natura est melior quam altera tantum: et ideo melius est universum in quo sunt angeli et aliae res, quam ubi essent angeli tantum: quia perfectio universi attenditur essentialiter secundum diversitatem naturarum, quibus implentur diversi gradus bonitatis, et non secundum multiplicationem individuorum in una natura." *In Sent.* I, d. 44, q. 1, a. 2, ad 6 (ed. Mandonnet, 11020–21).

33. *De Pot.*, q. 3, a. 16, co., ed. M. Pession (Turin: Marietti, 1953), 87: "Sed supposito quod tale universum producere voluerit, necessarium fuit quod tales et tales creaturas produxerit, ex quibus talis forma universi consurgeret. Et cum ipsa universi perfectio et multitudinem et diversitatem rerum requiratur, quia in una earum inveniri non potest propter recessum a complemento bonitatis primae; necesse fuit ex suppositione formae intentae quod Deus multas creaturas et

Thomas is careful to note, however, that this necessity does not stem from a limitation of God's power. Nor is it due to a demand of God's goodness, as the Neo-Platonists would hold. God is free to create or not to create, and (presumably) he is also free to create a universe without some of the grades of being. Instead, Thomas concludes, this hypothetical necessity is due to the order of God's wisdom: acting in light of it, God creates a universe that is perfect with all of its essential parts. Knowing what is best, God does what is best.<sup>34</sup> Thomas does not mean by this that the universe is a sort of Leibnizian "best possible world"; rather, as he notes in reply to an objection within the same article, "the universe that has been made by God is best as regards those things that exist, but not as regards those things that God can make."<sup>35</sup> God could always make this universe better, not by the addition of grades of being, but by the addition of new and different species.

Let us grant Thomas's position that all of the grades of being are necessary parts of this created universe. What follows for him, I would argue, is that all of the categories of being are also, by extension, necessary parts—perhaps not all as essential parts, but at least as something akin to properties or necessary accidents entailed by those that are.<sup>36</sup> Consider that one of the grades of being he identifies is corporeal being. If such being is an essential part of the universe, it follows that the category *substance* must be instantiated. And if there are bodily substances, there must also be quantities, as the category *quantity* follows upon the matter of such substances. Again, there must also be physical *qualities*

diversas produceret; quasdam simplices, quasdam compositas; et quasdam corruptibiles, et quasdam incorruptibiles."

34. Ibid.

35. *De Pot.*, q. 3, a. 16, ad 17: "Universum quod est a Deo productum, est optimum respectu eorum quae sunt, non tamen respectu eorum quae Deus facere potest" (90). Thomas addresses the topic of the "best possible world" a number of times throughout *De Pot.* See, e.g., *De Pot.*, q. 1, a. 5, ad 14–15; q. 3, a. 6, ad 26; q. 5, a. 1, ad 14. He also offers an *ex professo* consideration of this topic in the early *In Sent.* I, d. 44, q. 1, a. 2. On this topic, see Oliva Blanchette, *The Perfection of the Universe according to Aquinas* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 98–105 and 137–40.

36. My claim that Thomas implicitly views all the categories as necessary parts of the created universe is not to claim that he thinks each category must be instantiated at every given moment. Speaking in general about the necessary parts of the universe, he draws an analogy from the development of the human body, noting that the heart is formed in the embryo before any of the other organ parts. Similarly, the necessary parts of the universe need not have all existed together at its beginning, even though they must exist together at some later point in time for the world to be perfect and complete (*De Pot.*, q. 4, a. 2, ad s.c. 3).

possessed by them, such as colors, heat, and textures. Similarly, there must be *relations* between the aforementioned substances, and these substances have to exist at a certain *time*, *place*, and in a certain *position*. As corporeal beings are mobile beings, they will inevitably perform *actions* and suffer *passions*. The existence of corporeal substances, then, together with their ensuing accidents, ensures that each of the categories of being is manifested in the universe, with the exception of that one curious category, *habitus* or *equipment* (not to be confused with the habit that is a quality).

This category, in Thomas's view, constitutes a real mode of being that is predicated of a subject as something extrinsic to it, but not as a measure of the subject.<sup>37</sup> As he presents it, the category is uniquely predicable of man alone, who as a rational being is able to "have" things in a way that other beings cannot.<sup>38</sup> Thus, for Thomas, a condition such as "being clothed," "being shod," or "being armed" is a real mode of existence that has its being dependent upon the existence of man.<sup>39</sup> For this last category to be a necessary part of the universe, therefore, man would have to be as well. And, indeed, Thomas holds this to be the case. He tells us that man is an essential part of the universe because of his rational soul as well as his body that is ordered to the perfection of his nature. With his immaterial form, man is unique in the physical order.<sup>40</sup> As Eleonore Stump puts it, the human soul is a metaphysical amphibian, "occupying

37. *In Meta.* V, l. 9, n. 892.

38. *In Phys.* III, l. 5. In this text, he notes that this category can, by extension, be predicated of other animals: "non secundum quod in sua natura considerantur, sed secundum quod in hominis usum veniunt; ut si dicamus equum phaleratum vel sellatum seu armatum" (ed. P. M. Maggiolo [Turin: Marietti, 1954], 159).

39. Thomas does not appear to go beyond these traditional examples in any of his writings, lending the impression that the category *habitus* only concerns the having of clothing items or weaponry. Indeed, his account in *In Phys.* III, l. 5, of the derivation of this category focuses on man's need and ability to preserve and protect himself by having items. Elsewhere, however, he gives a more general account of the category, presenting it as a distinct mode of existence because such "having" is a medium between the haver and what is had, "prout scilicet unum est ornans vel tegens, et aliud ornatum aut tectum." *ST* I-II, q. 49, a. 1, co. (309). As I read Thomas, this sort of "having" could extend to any sort of material object that a human being might make use of on his person, for example, wearing a decorative hat, having a cup in hand, using a tool like a hammer, or playing a musical instrument like a flute. For a detailed consideration and defense of the category *habitus* according to Thomas, see Mark K. Spencer, "The Category of Habitus: Artifacts, Accidents, and Human Nature," *The Thomist* 79 (2015): 113–54.

40. *De Pot.*, q. 5, a. 10, co.

a niche in both the material and the spiritual realm."<sup>41</sup> Consequently, for Thomas, humans constitute a distinct grade of being. And inasmuch as human beings are an essential part of the universe that will inevitably act in accord with their natures as rational beings, their existence ensures that the category *habitus* is part of the universe as well.<sup>42</sup>

So much for this given universe. But what of other possible universes? As I have noted, following Thomas's metaphysics, it seems to be within God's power to create a universe populated by a single angel or by accidents alone. In other words, God *could* create a universe in which only some of the categories of being are instantiated. And the reason this would be within God's power is that there is nothing logically contradictory about such worlds. Thus, in Thomas's terms, they are absolute possibilities. But *would* God create such worlds? Thomas does not seem to offer a definitive answer either way. If, however, we follow what he has to say regarding the perfection of *this* universe, the goodness of God's creative act, and the order of his wisdom, the implication appears at least that it would be unfitting for God to do so.

According to Thomas, every agent makes something like itself. Because God is the most perfect agent, it belongs to him to make something most perfectly like himself; and because no single species of finite being is perfectly like him, God created a multiplicity of beings. Discussing this created universe, Thomas notes in SCG that "it was necessary that there be a multiplicity and variety in created things for this reason: that there be found in them a perfect likeness of God according to their own manner."<sup>43</sup> Indeed, any universe God might create would be a likeness of God; viewing the issue from this perspective, then, we find in Thomas's writings the implication that any universe without all of the grades of being (and by extension all the categories of being) would be an unfitting likeness.

41. Stump, *Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2003), 200; see also 17.

42. One objection to this conclusion might be that if man had never fallen from original sin, there would be no need for clothing or arms, and hence this category would not be instantiated. If, however, my hypothesis in note 39 above is correct—i.e., that the category of *habitus* for Aquinas extends to the having of other sorts of material objects as instruments of art—then even in a prelapsarian state there would be occasion for the instantiation of this category.

43. SCG II.45.2, Leon., 13:372: "Oportuit igitur esse multiplicitem et varietatem in rebus creatis, ad hoc quod inveniretur in eis Dei similitudo perfecta secundum modum suum."

### Conclusion

For Thomas, the ten Aristotelian categories are much more than logical intentions. As we have seen, these fundamental *genera* grasped by the mind refer back to fundamental modes of *esse*—modes of existing. And these modes are not merely parts of *ens commune*: they are also necessary parts of this created world. The reason that being manifests itself fully through all ten categories is that God makes the world as fully like himself as possible. Though God is not himself contained in any of the categories, Thomas tells us that he is nonetheless present in *all* of them as its measure and cause.<sup>44</sup> Thus, each of these parts of being—each of these finite modes of *esse*—is, in an imperfect way, like God; and the whole of created being, consisting of all of these parts taken together, is more perfectly like that infinite being who itself is subsisting *esse*.

44. *De Pot.*, q. 7, a. 4, ad 7. See also *In Sent.* I, d. 8, q. 4, a. 2, ad 3. Regarding God's presence in the genus *substance*, see my "Substance as a Metaphysical Genus," 119–27.